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EDITED BY

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ASIDES AND SOLILOQUIES

ALTHOUGH the SEWANEE REVIEW is not strictly regionalist, it has always stimulated creative writing in the South and has continuously published essays on themes relating to the South and poems by Southerners which reflect Southern feeling and traditions. Among other notable achievements, it has been quick to sense new stirrings of the creative impulse and has, indeed, during the last ten years provided the means of publication for Southern writers now commanding widespread deference. The Agrarian movement was launched in these pages by Mr. John Crowe Ransom's now-famous essay, "The South—Old or New" which in the rephrased form of "Reconstructed but Unregenerate" introduces the Southern symposium, *I'll Take My Stand*. The Agrarians, having been adopted by the New York publication, *The American Review*, continue their propaganda for the restitution of what they conceive to be "the Southern way of life" in the pages of that esteemed periodical. Doubtless, they will again appear in the pages of this Quarterly when occasion arises.

The literary distinction of the Agrarians has given them a position in American letters which is unparalleled in our history. Their characteristics as an orchestrated group differ from those of similar group movements such as the Transcendentalists of New

England, the Tractarians of Oxford, or the Pre-Raphaelites of the late Victorian era. From the time when they published their poetry in their notable magazine *The Fugitives* to the present, they have revealed a remarkable consistency of attitude and the development of a literary strategy and technique which is peculiarly their own. They have worked from within a legacy of cultural tradition of their region and, without servile transmission of literary tones and subjects of the Southern past, have developed that tradition by their own independent power and talent. No one not a member of their group could hope to write its full history: perhaps only John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, or Allan Tate could do so. Though this Quarterly has always been sceptical of the direction of Nashville Agrarians' ideology and has frequently questioned the correspondence of their definitions of the Southern mind and past with the fullness and variety of the available sources it has continuously respected their creative intention and has deliberately launched its criticism of Agrarian definitions and proposals under the conviction that only through criticism could the sources be reworked and the Agrarians expand their present interpretations of Southern possibilities. The time has arrived for some history of the Nashville Movement to be published; perhaps there would be no more appropriate place than in the pages of this periodical where its later phase was given its first opportunity of articulation. An invitation, then, is hereby publicly extended to Mr. Donald Davidson (who, in *Culture in the South* stated that the SEWANEE REVIEW was "lively but obtuse" in its attitude to Southern writers) to write the history of the Fugitive and Agrarian Movements: or, if this seems too "lively and obtuse", an invitation is extended to him, to Mr. John Crowe Ransom, or to Mr. Allan Tate to edit one issue of this Quarterly and to devote it entirely to the history, definitions, achievements, and directions of their movement.

THE Fugitives, unlike similar movements, have left their impression and influence on younger Southern writers. They created a literary idiom so peculiar and attractive that their signature may be seen in the diction, themes, metaphors, and general ontological aesthetic of poets elsewhere—in the United States and

in England. Obviously, also in the South and especially on poets educated in Vanderbilt University who have passed under the personal influence of Messrs. Ransom, Davidson, or Robert Penn Warren. This Quarterly experimented two or three years ago in printing some of the work of two of these younger Southern poets: Mr. Marshall Morgan and Mr. William Davidson. The selection became in effect a little poetry magazine occupying a space of its own within the larger confines of a Quarterly. The experiment proved so happy in its results that it is being continued in this issue with the group of versed epigrams by "Matthew Urban" who, though not influenced in any way by the Fugitives, is a Virginian of wit and understanding. In the next issue (January-March, 1935) will appear another group of poems by a Southern poet (and he one of the original Nashville group whose poetry appeared first, exclusive of the movement's organ *The Fugitive*, in the SEWANEE REVIEW: Merrill Moore.) In April, 1935, a third selection of poems by a Southern poet will appear in one of these little poetry magazines bound in the pages of this periodical: *These Fragments* by G. Marion O'Donnell of Memphis, Tennessee. Space is being reserved in the October, 1935 issue for a fourth group of poems by a Southern poet.

DOUBTLESS, this experimentation is "lively"—but is it obtuse? Obtuseness may mean hostility or indifference. The only novelty about this activity of the SEWANEE REVIEW is the publicizing aspect of its incessant eagerness to sustain the flowering of Southern literary talent. Hitherto, it has worked quietly by means of private correspondence and it has not abandoned that device. The flights of the editor to different parts of the South to discover promising talent and to confer with those who "know what is going on" have been made with some sacrifice in the life of one who is primarily a college professor. The number of provocative letters he has himself typed will, if and when rescued, establish him as the most voluminous and fluent correspondent of all time. All this is very lively but not at all obtuse—in the sense of hostility or indifference to the encouragement of creative letters in the South.

SO, under the general rubric of "lively" but not "obtuse" interest in stirrings of the literary impulse in the South, some word may now be said of a little known but active group of Southerners in Memphis, Tennessee, who deserve to be better known in the South and elsewhere. For the last two years, a little literary magazine has been published in Memphis called *The Observer*. It has published poetry, short stories, one-act plays, and literary criticism of a special pungency and effect. It is the organ of a group of writers who prefer publishing their own work and so avoid the exhausting expense of energy in submitting it to periodicals of wide circulation. The Memphis group of writers has sufficient importance to warrant a critical essay of some length in this Quarterly, but for the time being a mere sketch of the chief personalities must suffice. First in importance is Richmond Croom Beatty who, after a college career in Birmingham-Southern College (where he was influenced by Gilbert Mead, now President of Washington College, Maryland), proceeded to the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University at the time when the Agrarians were initiating their crusade and came under the personal influence of one of the most trenchant yet charming of the Agrarian Group: John Donald Wade, author of *The Life of General Longstreet*, *John Wesley*, and "The Life and Death of Cousin Lucius." Beatty and Wade had the urbane temperament which enabled them slyly to detect the factitious tendency of the Agrarians; and, though both accepted the Agrarian frame of reference, humorously worked away from it in their occasional compositions. Some indication of this may be seen in the poetry of Mr. Beatty already published in these pages. In his prose published in *The Observer*, he has written with an unusual fund of knowledge, considerable energy and directness, definite critical principles (analysis of which would disclose a coherent and reticulated philosophy) and a store of common sense that restrains him from flying off after the latest fads. Easily accessible to the general reader is his slyly whimsical and gently unheroic biographical criticism of *William Byrd of Westover*, which was possibly motivated by the factitious legend of the Agrarian concept of the Old South. Though Mr. Beatty has never been on the editorial board of *The Observer*, he has always advised the board, frequently castigated it, sometimes altered its course of action.

Then there is Theodore C. Hoepfner: of German descent, he has a remarkably hard head. His balance and sanity make him at once delightful as a conversationalist, not given to Southern ecstasies or rhodomontades and is an intellectually healthy critic. Though he has not yet published a book, his criticisms (mostly published in the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* during Miss Monte Cooper's first period as its literary editor) are trenchant and just; and his knowledge of William Blake qualifies him as an authority on that mystic and poet. Mr. Hoepfner seems, like so many other informed people, to be uninterested in publishing his work; doubtless, the gumshoeing and tactics necessitated by prevailing publishing conditions are obnoxious to him: he is indeed a person who really writes because writing gives him pleasure: and who proves that fact very consistently by refraining from what he calls "the overt act of publishing".

The four other editors of *The Observer* owe much to the advice and stimulus of Messrs. Beatty and Hoepfner, though each is sufficiently independent to do his own work in his own way. Harvey Scott Hincks, of Providence, Rhode Island, has had wide experience in his field (the Drama) in this country and in Europe. He has published a volume of one-act plays, he has just finished a long play, and he is now working on a novel. Blane Treadway and M. Irwin Carlson are both interested in Communism and in literature as propaganda for the class struggle. G. Marion O'Donnell has been strongly influenced by Mr. Beatty; and, since he has been, perhaps, the most energetic and persistent of the younger members of the editorial board, he becomes the link connecting, through Beatty, the Memphis with the Nashville groups of writers.

The Fugitive and Agrarian technique developed in Nashville by Mr. Sidney Mtttron-Hirsch, John Crowe Ransom and the rest shows obvious influence in the Memphis group. The Memphis *Observers* meet frequently and informally to discuss contemporary literature and to read their own work for discussion and criticism. Others, besides those already named, met with the group but these were the center. Then, one night some one in the group pointed out that of the number of so-called "little magazines" published in America, the only one in the South is *Contempo* which was criticized as apparently too much occupied with "mere fads". The

success of *The Double Dealer* was recalled; also *The Reviewer* and *The Fugitive*. After some discussion the group at length decided to publish a little magazine from Memphis, and *The Observer* was the result. Of course, finances constituted an important problem, but the editors, from time to time, happened to have a little money, so they started out bravely enough. Six issues have been published so far. Contributions have been welcomed from anywhere; selections being made on their effectiveness and no test of the economic or social principles of the writers was exacted. Contributions are judged as literature and solely as literature. Young Southern writers who had not yet found their audience were especially invited to contribute. There was no group programme: the temperaments and the beliefs of the members of the group were much too varied to permit agreement on a manifesto, even if the group had thought a manifesto desirable. Once it was under way, other Memphis writers contributed: Mr. John Newton Oldham (whose essay "A Matter of Idiom" is printed in this issue), Dr. A. Theodore Johnson of Southwestern College and Mr. Albert Russell Erskine, Jr., reviewed books; Mr. Erle Howry twice contributed verse, and Miss Monte Cooper also published two poems in *The Observer*.

WHETHER or not *The Observer* will continue as a Southern independent literary organ is at the moment problematical. The SEWANEE REVIEW in this brief notice of it and of the group supporting it hopes that, as in the instance of the *Fugitive*, it will attract the attention of benefactors in Memphis or elsewhere in the South, and that subscriptions may be sent to the editors of *The Observer*, care of Mr. G. Marion O'Donnell, 120 Church Street, Belzoni, Mississippi. If sufficient Southern support be given this sparkling periodical, perhaps the editors will be encouraged to rectify their failure to emphasize their Southern character (not aggressively, with waving of the Stars and Bars, but quietly) and to avoid imitation of the little magazines which are interested only in proletarian writers or in typographically and mentally gymnastic experimenters. *Absit omen!*